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## The Rollout

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## The Rollout

After a hot and dry day at the harbor yard, we made our way back to the warehouse. We were first to occupy the warehouse, so I let everyone spread out. Our space shrank quickly with the buildup of more units on the ground. When it was all said and done, we owned the middle of the warehouse. We used a wall made of duffle bags to separate living space. It was crowded, noisy and hot, but it was home. Now with the truck topped off with fuel and Soldiers fed it was time for my three S's (shit, shave, and shower).

Before I could get started, Truck Master called me to his office in the MP (motor pool). He informed me that all escort support had been diverted and I needed to grow my gun truck teams. He also told me that my unit would be reassigned to the 7th Group. I knew what meant; building FSB's (forward support bases) for following along units as we moved forward to the Iraqi border. The roads in Kuwait were dangerous for military convoys with a police escort and would only be worst without them. The local drivers didn't obey the traffic laws with police escorts now; it's only going to get worst. Oh, the highway exit from both the left and the right!

They only support their "Rights of way." Over here the highways feel like a derby races where the wins are identified by the most wrecked vehicles.

After making my way back to the warehouse, I briefed the Squad Leaders. "We move out in the morning to Camp Patriot near the border, pack for 5 days. The loadout time is 0700-0900, SP (start point) 0230. Have the Soldier in the MP 0500 for the convoy brief 0600 hrs. We must be on station at 0630 ready for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. After loading up, a bus will take us back to the warehouse until 0100. Now get some sleep it's going to be a long day." SSG Davis, asked me about escort support up route one. I told him, "All escorts are diverted to other

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missions. We will assign a bobtail for recovery and soft skin HUMMV with a ring mounted 50 cal. as a gun truck.”

The night passed quickly and by 0500 I was walking the MP lines spot-checking progress. The soldiers were preparing their trucks, checking their chains and binders, loading their gear, and quizzing each other over the ROEs (rules of engagement). By 0545 all the trucks were in convoy order. As I gave the convoy brief at 0600 the sweet smell of diesel power filled the air. We said a prayer with the chaplain and with one long blast of my trucks air horn, everything would change from training to execution with no playback buttons.

We arrived at the site safely and the driver wiped their HET (heavy equipment transport system) side by side like a defensive line on the gridiron facing the sunrise. We parked the trucks 50 yards away from the Marine ACVs (amphibious combat vehicle) and ash and trash vehicle.

Every team jumped out to be the first ones ready. SPC Robertson’s team lowered landing legs, chock block and had their ramps down first. Yes, we’re ready. The gun truck was in place and soldiers fired up. We all yelled, “Nothing happens till something moves!!!”

I walked the line, checking soldiers and checking time; it was 0715, we weren’t loading vehicles yet. “Pvt. Phillips, get HQ on the horn.”

“HQ, this is Roadrunner 4. Over,” said Pvt. Phillips

“Roadrunner 4, this is HQ. Go ahead.”

“HQ standby, for Roadrunner 7.”

“HQ, this is Roadrunner 7, what’s the ETA on the Marine Drivers, we’re standing by onsite, Over.”

“Roadrunner 7, heavy traffic on highway one, continue to stand by,” said HQ

“Roadrunner 7. Acknowledge all. Over.”

The soldiers were getting itchy, SSG Davis asked, “Could we load the ACVs ourselves? We’ve driven their vehicles off the ship, so loading them ourselves would be easy and we could get back sooner.” Having no escorts, a new gun crew, and a long trip, it wasn’t worth adding unauthorized movement into the mix. “No, that’s not our job. They will be here soon, stand by.”

They finally arrived and now we could get busy. The drivers started their vehicles and moved them to the loading line. I could hear running engines, metal clinking, and soldiers yelling. Everyone moved with speed and precision as they flowed back and forth across the trailers. They were loading and tying down everything by muscle memory. Soldiers jumped from trailer to trailer helping one another. As I moved through the line, I heard over all the noise a ghostly yell coming from my rear. The sound rattled my eardrum.

I ran toward the sound only to find soldiers everywhere: on the ground; on the trailer gooseneck; on the deck of the trailer and walking back and forth with their head in their hands. I walked to get closer. I wanted to be there; it was my promise to bring everyone back. “Make a hole! Get out of my way!” As I made my way forward questioning rushed my mind, what happened, is anyone hurt, was I too late, why was I on the opposite end of the line? “Move, get out of the way!” It looked bad. The Road Grader was against the gooseneck of the trailer and she was between them. “Call dust off, call dust off now! What are you waiting for, get your \*#@ moving!”

We moved the Grader back slowly as we held her up, letting her know it was going to be okay and dust off was on their way. Dust off arrived and she was taken to the level three hospital downtown Kuwait with her Squad leader. The shock of her getting hurt rocked our platoon. The soldiers felt the weight, not having a replay button. I called a quick pause of operations and huddled everyone around. “We have a team member who got hurt and was airlifted to level three

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for treatment. She will be okay, let's continue our mission and make her proud." I walked the line as the soldiers completed their tie-downs and mounted the trucks. The speed had changed, faces seemed long, and nervousness flowed overhead. As I walked to my truck, **Mark Twain's** words, "The **two most important days** in your life are the **day** you are born and the **day** you find out why," hit me like a rock. I knew why I was here. It was my job to lead them through the pains that are coming and guide them to victory.